

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd to the
Religious Societies 8,

IN AND ABOUT
L O N D O N,

AT THEIR
QUARTERLY MEETING,
IN THE

Parish Church of St. MARY LE BOW,
On *Wednesday, March* the 21st, 1738-9.

WITH
A View to stop the GROWTH of some MODERN
IRREGULARITIES.

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STERMON

Religious Societies

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MARK ix. 50.

— *Have Salt in your selves, and
have Peace one with another.*



THESE Words are subjoin'd in the Conclusion of our Saviour's Discourse concerning *Offences*, and the Duty of parting with any beloved Enjoyment, rather than it should prove the Occasion of our falling into Sin, and so being exposed to everlasting Punishment. *If thy Hand or thy Foot offend thee, cut it off; and if thine Eye offend thee, pluck it out: It is better for thee to enter into the Kingdom of God, halt, or maimed, or with one Eye, than having two, to be cast into Hell-fire; where their Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched^a. And then immediately it follows:----For every one shall be salted with Fire, and every Sacrifice shall be salted with Salt. Salt is good: But if the Salt have lost his Saltness, wherewith will you season it? Have Salt in your selves, and have Peace one with another^b.*

THE Connexion of this Passage, and its Pertinency to the Argument foregoing, which is not obvious at first View, will deserve to be clear'd up under a few Reflections.

^a Mark ix. 43—48.

^b Ver. 49, 50.

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SOME have thought that as the inward Efficacy or Grace of Baptism is elsewhere represented by the Emblem of *Fire*^c, so the continual Influence which is preserved in the Mind by the Workings of Divine Grace, is here described under the Name of *Salting with Fire*, in Allusion to the *Salting of Sacrifices* required by the Law^d. And thus the Phrases are made explanatory of each other, as describing the real Privilege of those who are Christians indeed; *every one* of whom is changed or renewed by the celestial *Fire* and vigorous Operation of the Holy Ghost, as *every Sacrifice* was *salted with Salt*.

BUT in regard that this Exposition seems not to render any Ground or Reason of the foregoing Discourse concerning the Punishment of wicked Men, there are others who chuse to understand this *Fire* of that *unquenchable Fire*^e before mentioned, wherewith *every one* of the wicked shall be tormented, compared in that Respect to the Offerings of the *Jews*, which were first sprinkled with *Salt*, and then consumed by the never-failing Fire of the Altar. To confirm which Exposition, they observe the Ambiguity of the *Hebrew* Phrase^f, in which the same Word may signify either to be *salted*, or *destroyed*. Which latter Acceptation was perhaps owing to the ancient Practice of marking out the Places devoted to *Destruction*, by the Ceremony of *Salt* strowed over them.

^c Mat. iii. 11.

^d Lud. de Dieu, in *Poli Synopf.* ad loc.

^e See *Lancaster's* Symbolical Dictionary, in the Word *Salt*.

^f The Word מלח which primarily signifies *to salt*, does in the Conjugation *Niphal* take the Sense of *vanishing*, *wearing away*, or *being consumed*, or *abolished*, as *Isa.* li. 6 And so if this Passage of *St. Mark* were translated into *Hebrew*, it might be expressed by that same Word equivocally used. כי כל באש ימלח וכל מנחה במלח תמלח The Copulative in both Languages may import as much as the Particle *ως*. See *Le Clerc's* *Harm.* and *Supplem.* to *Dr. Hammond* ad loc.

HOWEVER this may appear to suit with the foregoing Discourse, yet it seems not so suitable to the Verse following, in which *Salt* is recommended as good, and we are therefore advised to *have Salt in our selves*. For this Reason it would perhaps be better to take something from both Opinions, by interpreting one Clause of the Punishment of wicked Men, and the other of the Grace and Sanctification of the good. Thus as the foregoing Discourse alludes manifestly to the Fire in the Valley of *Hinnom*, in like manner with that Text of *Isaiab* [*They shall go forth and look upon the Carcasses of the Men that have transgressed against me: For their Worm shall not die, neither shall their Fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all Flesh^s:*] Upon which the *Jews* remark, that though our Bodies at present are *liable to be consumed by Fire*, yet God gives *Power to the Wicked to endure^h* under their Torments: So every one of them is here said, for the Purpose, to be *salted with Fire*; to receive, in the very midst of their Punishment, a Principle of Incorruption, to preserve their Bodies from being utterly consumed in the most devouring Flamesⁱ.

ON the other hand, as the Elect are represented, in that same Passage of *Isaiab*, to be *brought for an Offering unto the Lord out of all Nations^k*; so they are here described under the Notion of a *Sacrifice*, in regard that every true Christian is understood to offer up himself a *living Sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God^l*. But then, by way of opposition to the State of the Wicked before mentioned, who are *salted with Fire*, it is added, that *every Sacrifice shall be salted with Salt*; in Allusion to that Direction of the Law of *Moses*, which required that *all their Offerings* should

^s *Isai. lxvi. 24.*

ⁱ *Vid. Hammond in loc.*

^h *Vid. Lightfoot Horæ Hebr. ad loc.*

^k *Isai. lxvi. 20.*

^l *Rom. xii. 1.*

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*be seasoned with Salt*¹. Now as it is the Property of *Salt*, by eating out the Matter which is putrid and subject to Corruption, to make the rest more firm and durable, and fit for Use; this implies, that a present mortification and crucifying of the Flesh is necessary, in order to subdue our natural Corruptions, and *present our Bodies an acceptable Sacrifice*.

A *SALTING* then there must be, of one kind or other^m; and if we would not be *salted* in the Life to come with the *Fire* of Divine Justice, preserving our Bodies to sustain that Vengeance which is due to Wickedness, we should make it our Endeavour to be *season'd* in this Life with the *Salt* of Divine Grace, to mortify the carnal Appetite, and preserve us to a glorious State of Incorruptionⁿ.

FROM these *Seasonings* of Grace, which, together with the improving of our selves, do qualify us also for the Improvement of Mankind, are Christians stiled the *Salt of the Earth*^o; and to them is this Saying applicable---*Salt is good, but if the Salt have lost his Saltness, wherewith will you season it?* If the eminent Professors of Christ's Religion should apostatize from the Grace given to them, what Method can be used for their Recovery? They have rejected the only Way and Method of Salvation; and, except they *return* to him from whom they have *gone astray*^p, *there remaineth no other Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation*^q;---the *Fire* of Divine Justice to succeed, when the *Saltness* of Grace is forfeited, and they who had it are quite become unfavoury.

¹ Levit. ii. 13.

at supra.

^q Heb. x. 26, 27.

^m Vid. Grot. in loc.

^o Mat. v. 13.

ⁿ Vid. Lightfoot

^p 1 Pet. ii. 25.

FROM

FROM all this the Admonition of the Text naturally follows, and will be easily explain'd.----*Have Salt in your selves, and have Peace one with another.* Which Text should be more distinctly consider'd in both its Parts.

I. IN respect of those personal Qualifications it requires in our selves. And,

II. IN respect of those relative Duties it prescribes us towards one another.

I. *First*, IN respect of those personal Qualifications it requires in our selves: *Have Salt in your selves.*

NOW as they are observed to be the Properties of *Salt*, to penetrate and spread its Relish through the Subject to which it is applied, to separate or eat out the corruptible Parts, and to make the rest more firm, compact, and durable; we will see how the Grace of God, ruling in the Hearts and Lives of faithful Christians, answers to this Character in all Respects, and is the *Salt* by which we are prepared to overcome the Corruptions of this mortal Life, and to live in a State of Immortality.

1. *First*, IT penetrates through the whole Man; it gives a Tincture of Religion to every Faculty and every Power, and brings the Will and Affections of the Mind in Subjection to the Law of God. The Shew of Religion may be vain and hypocritical; but the inward Principle, which governs and directs the Heart, that is the *Salt* which reaches to every Disposition, which guides the very Motions and Desires of the Mind, and determines them to Good. In consequence hereof, our Words and Actions will be sancti-

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sanctified, and made subservient to Purposes of real Piety. Our *Speech* it self will *alway be with Grace, seasoned with Salt*⁹; and we shall perceive such Saviour and Relish in the Exercises of Religion, that it will be *Meat and Drink* to us, as it was to the Author of our Virtue and Happiness, *to do the Will* of our Father which is in Heaven^r.

I do not mean by this, that Christians are required to attend to nothing else, besides the Exercises of Devotion. The Frailty of our Nature will not admit of such perpetual and uninterrupted Contemplation: Nor would it consist with our attending to that Variety of Duties God has called us to discharge. Be we Masters, or Servants; be we Magistrates, or private Men; be we employed in civil or military Offices, or obliged to support our Families by Trade or manual Labour; we should look on every Station, with Ability to execute the Duty of it, as a Talent entrusted with us by God, of which we must one Day render an Account. When therefore we discharge these Offices, under a Sense of Duty, and as fulfilling the Ends of God's Appointment, even they are converted into Acts of true Religion; they are sanctified with the *Salting* of Divine Grace: And whoever prescribes the Exercises of Devotion, to the Neglect or Exclusion of these other Duties, he quite mistakes the Nature of the Christian Calling, and that *reasonable Service* which the Gospel has enjoin'd. Nay, I will add, that the ordinary Acts of Life, even Eating and Drinking, and common Recreations, indifferent as they may seem to vulgar, injudicious Men, yet when justly calculated to preserve Health, and qualify us to go through our Duty with greater Vigour and Activity, are ultimately resolved into the *Glory of God*^s, the governing Motive and Principle of all our

⁹ Col. iv. 6.

^r John iv. 34.

^s 1 Cor. x. 31.

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ACTIONS. Though we keep our Eye fixed upon the other World, yet we are not to forget that we must pass through this; and should therefore be careful to maintain our Post and Station, and discharge the Duties of those several Relations in which God has placed us.

2. Secondly, IN consequence of this penetrating Quality, the same Grace of God will purge out the evil, carnal Principle, and *cast off* the remainder of the old Man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful Lusts^t: In Allusion^u still to the Property of Salt, which corrects the putrifying Juices, and eats out that which is tending to Corruption. If our Minds be conformed to the Law of God, this argues them to be renewed from their carnal state; since the carnal Mind is declared to be *Enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be*^w. If our Speech be with Grace, seasoned with Salt^x, it naturally follows, that no corrupt Communication will proceed out of our Mouths^y; no Blasphemy, nor Oaths, no Filthiness, nor foolish Talking, nor Jestings which are not convenient^z. Finally, if the Actions of our Lives be modell'd by the Precepts of Piety towards God, and of Justice and Charity to Men, we shall be far removed from all impious Neglect or Violation of religious Duties, and from all enormous Acts of Injustice and Oppression.

YET here again is need of Caution, lest this Doctrine be screw'd too high, to the Offence of scrupulous and weak Minds, who are inclined to judge too severely of themselves, because they are not clear'd

^t Eph. iv. 22.

^u I do not mean that the Text to the *Ephesians* has such Allusion, tho' the Words may be so accommodated.

^w Rom. viii. 7.

^x Col. iv. 6.

^y Eph. iv. 29.

^z Chap. v. 4.

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from all their Frailties, nor advanced to a State of sinless and absolute Perfection. We do not look for such Perfection in the present Life, which is a State of Growth and Progress; but we expect it as the Conclusion and Finishing of all, in a State of Consummation.

IN the mean Time, we think it worthy of the Christian Character, that nothing contrary to the Divine Law be allowed or indulged in us; that we pray for Help from above, to mortify and gradually subdue all the Remains of Vice, and labour continually for an Increase in Goodness; but that, after all, we trust not to any Works or Worthiness of ours, but only hope to be accepted, in the Sight of our Creator, through the Merits of him who *tasted Death for every Man*^a, and has in all Points satisfied the Law of God. If any evil Thoughts obtrude themselves upon us, yet so long as they are not allowed or consented to, but detested and abhorred, they may be Matter indeed of Grief and Humiliation, to remind us of our Frailty, and the Danger we are in from Temptation; but they will not break off our Communion with God, nor defeat the Operations of his Holy Spirit. If at any Time we are betrayed by them into grosser Sins, yet still the Gospel allows us the Remedy of Repentance, by which we may renew our broken Covenant, and rise again to Holiness of Life. And as for the Sins of daily Incurfion, which may happen to escape our Notice, and those Frailties which do continually adhere to the best of our Performances, we have the Comfort to know they shall be graciously overlook'd, upon our habitual Repentance, and Faith in him, who died to supply our Deficiencies; and may rest assured, that a Day is coming, when this Weakness of the Flesh shall have an End, and the

^a Heb. ii. 9.

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Body which is *sown in Corruption*, shall be *raised in Incorruption*^b. Then the *Salt* of the Text will have performed its Office, not in this only, but also,

3. IN the *Third* Point of Resemblance which was mentioned, in that it makes the Subject, to which it is applied, more firm, compact, and durable. For this Purpose the Expression of *Salting*^c is applied to Covenants, as a Symbol of Perpetuity. And, besides an Allusion to the usual Practice of ratifying Covenants by Feasting^d, of which *Salt* was judg'd to necessary an Appendage, that it was often put to signify the whole Provision of the Table, and the common Sustenance or Support of Life^e: It denotes withal the Immutability of the Engagement, and the inviolable Sanction with which it is confirmed. So the *Salt* of the *Jewish* Sacrifices is expressly stiled *the Salt of the Covenant of God*^f; the Rights of the Priesthood are said to be *a Covenant of Salt for ever*^g; and in like manner the *Kingdom* was ensured to the House of *David for ever*, by a *Covenant of Salt*^h. And suitably to this, when Places are in Scripture doom'd to *Saltiness*, and have *Salt strawed* over them, in token of their being waste and desolate, to be no more *sown* or *inhabited*ⁱ; from whence the Word was noted to receive a new Signification; This, besides an Allusion

^b 1 Cor. xv. 42.

^c See Mr. *Lancaſter's* Dictionary, *ut ſupra*.

^d See Dr. *Cudworth's* Discourse concerning the true Notion of the Lord's Supper, Chap. VI.

^e When the King of *Persia's* Officers ſay, *Ezra* iv. 14. *We have Maintenance from the King's Palace*, the *Chaldee* Phraſe is, מלח היכלא מלחנא, *We have ſalted with the Salt of the Palace*; i. e. in our common Phraſe, *We have eaten of the King's Bread*. So *Æſchines* (*de falſâ Legatione*, p. 250. Ed. 1607.) mentions πόλειος ἄλας καὶ τῆς δημοσίας τραπέζης, *the Salt of the City, and the publick Table*, as the Provision that was made for the Ambaſſadors at the publick Expence. And from hence the Wages or Stipend allowed for the Subſiſtence of Officers, was called *Salarium*, a *Salary*. See *Hammond* in loc. and *Le Clerc's Supplement*.

^f Lev. ii. 13.

^g Numb. xviii. 19.

^h 2 Chron. xiii. 5.

ⁱ See Deut. xxix. 33. Judg. ix. 45. Pſal. cvii. 34. Jer. xvii. 6. Ezek. xlvii. 11. Zeph. ii. 9.

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to the Barrenness of those Lands where *Salt* is found, is reasonably thought to import the Durableness and Perpetuity, or the fixed and unalterable Appointment, of such Desolation.

PROPORTIONABLY hereunto, let Christians learn to be firm and stable, and resolute in their Profession, *rooted and built up, and established in the Faith^k; knowing in whom they have believed^l*, and rejoicing in the Terms of that Salvation he has wrought for them: Not like those fickle, wavering Minds, who are *ever learning, and never able to come to the Knowledge of the Truth^m*, but perpetually moved or driven through a Circle of Opinions, as if Truth it self were variable with the Wind, and ready to close in with any new Teacher, who shall pretend to greater Light, and to make higher Advances in the Perfection of Gospel Holiness. Let the Divine Revelation be the Standard of our Faith, and the Director of our Practice: And when we are well confirmed in its Doctrines and Precepts, we shall be bold to persevere in our Adherence to them, and think our selves safe, in the Bosom of a Church, which proposes that Revelation as the Rule for our Observance.

THE Consequence hereof will be, that we be united and knit together in one Communion and Fellowship; that we *endeavour to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peaceⁿ*; that we carry on the Resemblance of *Salt*, as its Firmness is a Note of Union and good Agreement, and as, being put in general for all the Food prepared in Feasts for Confirmation of Covenants, it became the usual Bond of Amity and Friendship^o;

^k Col. ii. 7. ^l 2 Tim. i. 12. ^m Chap. iii. 7. ⁿ Eph. iv. 3.

^o So ἁλᾶς καὶ τρεῖς πέζα are said to be used proverbially to signify Friendship, and ἁλᾶς καὶ τρεῖς πέζαν παραβαίνειν to violate the most sacred League of Friendship. Vid. Cudworth, ubi supra.

that,

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that, in the Words of the Text, we *have Peace one with another; and above all Things put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection*^p. But these Considerations belong rather to those relative Duties, which,

II. IN the *Second Place*, I had propos'd to observe from the Admonition of the Text, *Have Peace one with another*.

THE Christian Religion, or the Grace which it displays, does not only exert the Properties of *Salt*, in those Operations it has upon our Minds and Manners; but it derives the same Properties upon those who are eminently acted by it, in respect of the rest of Mankind, among whom they live and converse. Therefore Christians are declared to be *the Salt of the Earth*^q, as being communicative of the good Qualities of which they are possess'd, and, both by their Conversation and Example, instrumental to improve and edify as many as live within the Compass and Sphere of their Activity. By this means the good Qualities, which actuate them, will (as it were) pierce and penetrate through their Neighbourhood; assimilating others to themselves, by purging and expelling their Corruptions, and helping to confirm and establish them in Christian Graces. Not only they who are, by Station and Office, more particularly concerned to direct the Principles and Practices of others, such as Masters, and Parents, and Magistrates, and Spiritual Pastors, will exert their Influence, with regard to such as are under their Inspection; but all Christians in general, who have any Warmth of Zeal, govern'd with Discretion and Charity, may be greatly serviceable in reforming Mankind, and promoting the Influence of Virtue and Religion. By discharging the Duties of their own

^p Col. iii. 14.

^q Matt. v. 13.

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Stations, as well as by helping to improve the Knowledge and Zeal of others, will their *Light shine* in such manner *before Men, that they may see their good Works,* and be induced thereby to *glorify God* ^a.

BUT more especially this will be done by the Charity and Peaceableness of their Behaviour. The Firmness of *salted Bodies* was before noted to be an Emblem of Union and Perpetuity: And so general was the Use of Feasting, to ratify Contracts or Engagements, that *Salt*, as it denoted the whole Provision of the Table, grew easily to be the Symbol of Amity secured by such Contracts. Upon both Accounts, the Stability of the strongest Covenants was observed to be expressed under this Metaphor. How improperly then will they be said to *have this Salt in themselves*, who are disunited by Strife and Variance, instead of being close compacted by that Bond of Amity, which is the proper Cement here intended? *The Fruit of Righteousness is sown in Peace, of them that make Peace* ^r. And therefore all they who sow Discord and Confusion among Brethren, have other Fruit to expect than that of Righteousness, and have reason to apprehend another Recompence. *Peace on Earth, and Good-will to Men* ^s, is the declared End and Foundation of the Gospel-Promises: And whilst the Christian Covenant displays to us the Divine Philanthropy, and shews the gracious Terms of being at Peace with God, it sets before us the most powerful Motives to Forbearance and Good-will, that we may study and *follow after the Things which make for Peace* ^t; and considering *what manner of Love hath been bestowed upon us* ^u, we may not be backward to exercise the mutual Offices of Love and Tenderneſs to one another.

^a Mat. v. 16.

^t Rom. xiv. 19.

^r James iii. 18.

^u 1 John iii. 1.

^s Luke ii. 14.

AMONG

AMONG the other Expressions of such Love and Tenderneſs, there is none that appears more commendable, or more worthy of our Care and Imitation, than that of endeavouring to improve and *edify one another* * in Christian Graces; to spread abroad the Knowledge of Salvation, and *provoke one another to Love and to good Works* †. And ſo our Subject returns to the Head from whence it ſet out, *viz.* the Chriſtian's Duty, not only to *have Salt in himſelf*, but likewise to exert his Faculty for the Benefit of others, and approve himſelf *the Salt of the Earth*.

BUT becauſe this Duty ſeems, of late, to have been in great meaſure miſtaken, and ſtretch'd beyond the Line of good Order and Decorum, by ſome Perſons among us, who have diſcover'd a great Fervour of Zeal, but not guided with that Prudence and Diſcretion one would wiſh; I ſhall take Leave to employ the Remainder of our Time, in laying down a few Cautions or Reſtrictions, to guard againſt the Exorbitances of this Kind, and remind you, that whiſt you are ſtudying to proſecute one Duty, you be not found to violate another. *It is good to be zealouſly affected always in a good Thing* ‡: But then that Zeal ſhould be conducted with *Knowledge* §; or elſe it will be apt to kindle Strife and Animofity, and endanger the Overthrow of the Cauſe it aims to ſerve. To begin therefore,

I. *Fiſt*, LET the Rules and Methods you obſerve, for the Advancement of Piety, be always regulated with a juſt Regard and Deference to thoſe Laws and Conſtitutions to which you owe Obedience. Or if you have not ſuch Knowledge of theſe Matters, as to

* Rom. xiv. 19.

† Heb. x. 24.

‡ Gal. iv. 18.

§ Rom. x. 2.

be answerable for every Circumstance or Punctilio; yet, at least, you should be careful that you incur not any manifest and flagrant Violations of Law; that you offend not against the End and Design of it, nor give Umbrage or Suspicion of any thing that tends to weaken the Establishment. Particularly, when you profess to meet *privately* for this Purpose, let there be no such Concourse or Resort of Numbers, as shall bear the Appearance of a *publick* Congregation. And if you keep not within the strictest Bounds prescribed by Law, at least be cautious of running into such Excess, as shall seem to set the Law at Defiance, and imply a Resolution to have Publick Worship, not in the Way which the Wisdom of your Governors appoints you, but in another of your own devising. For what is this, but to open illegal Conventicles, not only against the Rules of Uniformity, but even without License, or Benefit of Toleration? And yet 'tis to be fear'd, Exorbitancy of Numbers is not the greatest Irregularity you have to guard against. To proceed therefore,

2. *Secondly*, WHATEVER Rules or Methods you prescribe to your selves, for improving one another in Knowledge and Virtue, be not rigorous in exacting the same Rules of other Men, nor conceive the worse Opinion of them, because they do not, in every Point, come up to the Standard of your Example. It argues too great Narrowness of Spirit, not to distinguish between the Means and the End, nor between those Means which are prescribed us by a proper Authority, and those which are Matter of our own Choice, the Result of private Prudence and Discretion. To grow in Grace^b, is the Concern of every Christian; but perhaps we may not all judge alike of every Method by which such Growth is promoted, since different

^b 2 Pet. iii. 18.

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Methods have been used, with good Success, by Persons of different Genius and Capacity. And where the Laws of God and Man have left free Scope and Latitude, who shall presume to straiten and confine it, or set up the Scantlings of his own Judgment, as the Standard of common Obligation? Under such Conduct and Management, our Christian Graces will be in danger of diminishing, by the very Means we use to encrease them; our Severities upon our selves will be apt to degenerate into Moroseness towards others, and an uncharitable Love of Censure will affect to usurp the Place of Christian Charity.

3. *Thirdly*, BE careful that no Excellency you either see or imagine in some Preachers, above others, be allowed to draw you off from that Attention which is due to those, to whose Care the Providence of God has regularly committed you. It was a Fault severely reprehended in the Church of *Corinth*, that they were apt to set up one Preacher against another, professing themselves to be of *Paul*, *Apollos*, or *Cephas*^c; as if they had set up for Heads of different Doctrine, and were not rather Fellow-Labourers, in the same common Cause, to preserve their Converts in the Unity of the Faith, and prevent any Division of the Body of Christ. And though there was no Church, in the Apostle's Age, more abounding in spiritual Gifts than that of *Corinth*; yet this Strife about their Preachers is condemn'd as an Argument of *carnal Affection*, and a Proof that they still *walked as Men*^d.

THE Church of Christ is extended far and wide, and requires many Hands to be employed in its Ministrations. And this is sure to be done to most Advantage, when the People are content to sit peaceably

^c 1 Cor. i. 12.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 3.

under their own Pastors, without studying to gratify an *itching Ear*, by running after those to whom they have no Relation, to the great Disturbance of the publick Peace and Order, and the Hindrance of that Beauty and Comeliness of Worship, which adds a Grace and Ornament to Piety it self.

So far as this, you may be caution'd against all tumultuous Resort to those Places, whither your Fancy, rather than your Duty, leads you; even though the Preachers agree in the same Doctrines of Religion, and desire to promote the same Ends of Piety. And I am willing to suppose that no regular Divine of our Church would encourage the People to desert the Communion of their proper Parishes, and the Ministry of those whom the Providence of God, in the Course of Law, has placed over them; and to be wildly running from one Parish to another, where, as they themselves can have no Right to appear, so they that have, are greatly incommoded by their Multitude.

BUT there is a farther Danger from this popular Humour of chusing Preachers to your selves. It cannot always be depended on, that the Persons so admired, shall utter nothing but sound Doctrine. They may err, even though they do not mean to deceive: And it often happens, that they who err most, are most confident of being right, and make the boldest Pretences to the Help of the Spirit, and Divine Illumination. When this is the Case, they lead those, who hold them so much in Admiration, implicitly to follow their Delusions: Whilst they who adhere to their own Pastors, as combined with the rest of the Community, have a much better Preservative against dangerous Errors, and have less to fear from the Vagaries and Madness of Enthusiasm.

But

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But to return to Affairs of a more private Nature.
Let it,

4. *Fourthly*, BE your Care, in your religious Conferences, *not to exercise your selves in great Matters, or in Things too high for you^c*, not busily to pry into the Subtilties that have been started about Mysteries of Faith; but rather avoid every thing that tends to Innovation, and receive the Doctrines of your holy Religion in that Plainness and Simplicity, with which they are reveal'd and taught in the Church; and apply them to the Direction of your Practice, with that Humility and Sincerity of Mind, which may evince that the same *Word*, which you *have heard with the hearing of the Ear^f*, has likewise been inwardly *engrafted* in the Heart^g.

THERE is an Use, no doubt, in critical Enquiries, and that Treasure of Knowledge which is fetch'd from ancient Acts and Monuments. But it belongs to the Men of Leisure and learned Education, who are conversant with Books, and Languages and Sciences, who are able to pick out the Truth from many Intimations, and know how to detect the Fraud and Fallacy of an Impostor. To these therefore such learned Disquisitions should be left and referr'd: And if Persons of lower Education and Attainments shall engage in them, and expect a Divine Illumination to lead them to the Truth in such Proceedings; This I should call tempting, and not trusting to the Spirit, and no wonder if they fall into Delusion.

FOR the same Cause, let them beware how they take upon them to expound or interpret Scripture,

^c Psal. cxxxi. 1.

^f Job xlii. 5.

^g James i. 21.

especially beyond the Bounds of their respective Families. We are not without many Books, written by Men of great Learning and Abilities, but yet fit to be consulted by Persons of a lower Education. In these it will be more proper to exercise your selves, than to hazard the Excursions of your own Judgment, or trust to the casual Interpretation of Persons neither call'd nor qualified for that Purpose. Though the Use of private Judgment be necessary, yet the Teachings of a private Spirit may be dangerous. And therefore, as I would require no Man to believe implicitly, but advise every one to judge for himself, in proportion to the Reach of his Abilities; so at the same time it is fit he be reminded to call in all proper Help and Assistance to direct his Judgment, and consult them in particular whose Study and Profession of Life have qualified them to give Advice to others. Without this, we have no Title to expect the Direction of the Spirit, who loves to dispense his gracious Aid, in the regular Use of those Means which he affords us, but not in the Neglect or Contempt of them. Numberless are the Errors which have risen from the Overflowings of Enthusiasm, when Persons of no Education or Attainments, nor any regular Appointment to the Office of instructing others, have fancied to themselves an inward Call and Direction of the Spirit, and from thence have invaded or assumed the Preacher's Office, *desiring to be Teachers of the Law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm*^h. Once more,

5. *Fifthly*, It should be particularly recommended, that nothing be admitted in the more private Exercises of Religion, which may imply or create any Dislike or Disesteem of the Liturgy, and publick Devotions of the Church.

^h 1 Tim. i. 7.

THEY who have the Interest of Religion at heart, should more especially be careful to avoid every thing that tends to Schism or Division, as that which eats out the Vitals of Religion, and destroys that Charity which animates and invigorates the Body of Christ. For this Reason our private Exercises should be so far from taking us off, or pleading an Excuse for the Neglect of Publick Worship, that they should rather be instrumental and subservient to make us more lively and zealous in the Acts of publick Communion. They, whose Labour for the Necessaries of Life gives them less Leisure, should be taught not to omit the Service of the Church, for the sake of any fancied Excellencies in a Method of more private Nature. And they, whose Leisure is greater, should at least take care so to divide their Time, as not to suffer any Devices of their own to interfere with the Hours of Parochial Worship. Much less should they encourage any Sentiments or Proceedings, which shall cast an Imputation on the Publick Offices, as if they were less perfect and excellent in their Kind, or not so well calculated for common Edification, as might be contrived or pointed out by Persons of a warmer Zeal, and unwearied Affiduity.

EXPERIENCE has shewn that it is not safe to trust every Preacher with prescribing the Devotions of the People, and much less with throwing out *extemporary* Effusions, which would oftentimes be ill digested, and sometimes full of Impiety; which at best must be unknown and unapproved by the Audience, who are obliged to wait for the finishing of his Sentences, before they know whether they be fit for them to join in or not. These Inconveniences are avoided by having stated Forms, composed before-hand, by Men
of

of Wisdom and Piety, enjoin'd by proper Authority, and put into every one's Hands, that all may be acquainted with the Matter and Purport of their Petitions.

ALL this is reckon'd to be a just Recommendation of our Liturgy: And, whatever some may pretend of the immediate Assistance of the Holy Ghost, to inspire them with Matter and Words; we think we may, with greater Safety, depend upon his blessed Influences, to assist the serious Deliberations of Persons properly appointed, than to authorize the sudden and unpremeditated Excursions of any private Pastor whatsoever. In both Cases there is a Form equally prescribed to the Audience, it being impossible for Numbers of Men to join together in the same Prayer, but that Prayer will necessarily become a common Form to them. Only in one Case it is a stated pre-composed Form, appointed by Authority, and known before-hand: In the other Case, it is an arbitrary undigested Form, dictated on the sudden by the Person that officiates, and varying as his fancied Occasions or Inclinations lead him. And can it need any Enquiry, in which Case the Wants of the People are most properly consulted; or in which Case the People are most visibly imposed on, at the Will and Pleasure of their Pastors?

THESE have been thought Arguments of great Weight and Importance against the Use of *extempore* Prayers, by Numbers of People met together. And, be the Number less or greater, I judge the Arguments will have a proportionable Weight: So that, whatever be determined about the solitary Prayers of one Man by himself, yet where others are to join with him, a set Form of Words drawn up before, and
known

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known and approved by those who are to join in it, is the most edifying Method of united Prayer, and liable to least Exception. If once People judge otherwise in lesser Instances, they will insensibly derive a Disesteem on the Publick Offices of the Church, and incline of course to desire Alterations. For if it be more edifying for a gifted Brother to exercise his Talent at *extempore* Prayer in one Assembly; what should hinder him and his Admirers from wishing he had Liberty to do it in another, and from preferring those Opportunities of Worship, in which such Liberty is used, to those in which he is restrained from it? And thus, by degrees, the Liturgy comes to be accounted, as the ancient Puritans reproached it, a Yoke and Burden, a Stinting of the Spirit, and an unreasonable Restraint of Liberty. So that I cannot but suspect, that the Preference which some have lately given to the Use of *extempore* Prayers, by Numbers of People met together, is opening a wide Door to Schism, and making way for all the Extravagancies of a private Spirit.

TO CONCLUDE, my Brethren; Let not any Pretext or Shew of Piety, let not any Assiduity, or Diligence, or Warmth of an extraordinary Zeal, so fasten and attach you to the Persons of Men, as to lead you to prefer their private Fancies to the Catholick Rule of Unity and Order; but learn to adhere stedfastly to the Communion and Worship of the Church, under the Ministry of those Pastors, to whom the Providence of God has properly committed you; and let no Opinion of your private Edification be indulged to the Prejudice of publick Duties. We may expect the more abundant Communications of Divine Grace, by attending to that Way and Method which the Divine Wisdom has appointed: And
by

24. *A SERMON preach'd, &c.*

by keeping all our private Exercises subordinate to this, we may hope to grow in Graceⁱ, and go on from Strength to Strength^k, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ^l. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and henceforth, for evermore. *Amen.*

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 18.

^k Psal. lxxxiv. 7.

^l Eph. iv. 13.

F I N I S.



